



STATE SENATOR • LIZ BRATER • 18TH DISTRICT

Brater Press Release

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SEN. BRATER ACTS AGAINST LAWSUITS DESIGNED TO SILENCE CRITICS

Brater: “These lawsuits only serve as intimidation to stifle public speech.”

LANSING - Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) has introduced legislation to protect citizens exercising their constitutional right of free speech from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). Currently, developers, gravel pit owners, and even public employees have filed libel and slander suits against citizens who express their views to protect natural resources, protest public decisions, or serve as ‘whistleblowers’ on illegal activities. These lawsuits have an intimidating effect on citizen efforts to speak their views in public forums.

“The democratic system relies on the ability of citizens to express their views freely in a public forum,” said Sen. Brater. “These suits have had a chilling effect on the exercise of free speech. We must protect the ability of citizens to exercise their First Amendment rights.”

Brater cites a recent example where a gravel pit owner sued residents who spoke out at a DEQ meeting, as well as other cases where developers have sued residents who spoke out to protect wetlands and trees.

When developers and others threaten citizens with lawsuits, citizens often lack the resources to defend themselves in the legal system. This legislation provides for dismissal of such cases, prescribes fines for those initiating such cases, and allows for recovery of attorney fees. It conveys immunity from civil lawsuits to citizens communicating with governmental units or public officials for legitimate purposes. Under the legislation, a court is required to dismiss claims brought against a person operating under this immunity.

Senate Bill 1195 was referred to the Judiciary Committee.

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State Senator Brater represents Senate District 18 which includes the cities of Ann Arbor, Chelsea, and Ypsilanti, the Villages of Barton Hills and Dexter, and the following townships: Ann Arbor, Augusta, Dexter, Freedom, Lima, Lyndon, Northfield, Salem, Scio, Sharon, Superior, Sylvan, Webster and Ypsilanti. She is the minority vice chair of the Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism Committee.